

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

YOUNG CADDLES IN LONDON.

I.

All unaware of the trend of events, unaware of the laws that were closing in upon all the Brethren, unaware indeed that there lived a Brother for him on the earth, young Caddles chose this time to come out of his chalk pit and see the world. His brooding came at last to that. There was no answer to all his questions in Cheasing Eyebright; the new Vicar was less luminous even than the old, and the riddle of his pointless labour grew at last to the dimensions of exasperation. "Why should I work in this pit day after day?" he asked. "Why should I walk within bounds and be refused all the wonders of the world beyond there? What have I done, to be condemned to this?"

And one day he stood up, straightened his back, and said in a loud voice, "No!

"I won't," he said, and then with great vigour cursed the pit.

Then, having few words, he sought to express his thought in acts. He took a truck half filled with chalk, lifted it, and flung it, smash, against another. Then he grasped a whole row of empty trucks and spun

them down a bank. He sent a huge boulder of chalk bursting among them, and then ripped up a dozen yards of rail with a mighty plunge of his foot. So he commenced the conscientious wrecking of the pit.

"Work all my days," he said, "at this!"

It was an astonishing five minutes for the little geologist he had, in his preoccupation, overlooked. This poor little creature having dodged two boulders by a hairbreadth, got out by the westward corner and fled athwart the hill, with flapping rucksack and twinkling knicker-bockered legs, leaving a trail of Cretaceous echinoderms behind him; while young Caddles, satisfied with the destruction he had achieved, came striding out to fulfil his purpose in the world.

"Work in that old pit, until I die and rot and stink!... What worm did they think was living in my giant body? Dig chalk for God knows what foolish purpose! Not I!"

The trend of road and railway perhaps, or mere chance it was, turned his face to London, and thither he came striding; over the Downs and athwart the meadows through the hot afternoon, to the infinite amazement of the world. It signified nothing to him that torn posters in red and white bearing various names flapped from every wall and barn; he knew nothing of the electoral revolution that had flung Caterham, "Jack the Giant-killer," into power. It signified nothing to him that every police station along his route had what was known as Caterham's ukase upon its

notice board that afternoon, proclaiming that no giant, no person whatever over eight feet in height, should go more than five miles from his "place of location" without a special permission. It signified nothing to him that on his wake belated police officers, not a little relieved to find themselves belated, shook warning handbills at his retreating back. He was going to see what the world had to show him, poor incredulous blockhead, and he did not mean that occasional spirited persons shouting "Hi!" at him should stay his course. He came on down by Rochester and Greenwich towards an ever-thickening aggregation of houses, walking rather slowly now, staring about him and swinging his huge chopper.

People in London had heard something of him before, how that he was idiotic but gentle, and wonderfully managed by Lady Wondershoot's agent and the Vicar; how in his dull way he revered these authorities and was grateful to them for their care of him, and so forth. So that when they learnt from the newspaper placards that afternoon that he also was "on strike," the thing appeared to many of them as a deliberate, concerted act.

"They mean to try our strength," said the men in the trains going home from business.

"Lucky we have Caterham."

"It's in answer to his proclamation."

The men in the clubs were better informed. They clustered round the tape or talked in groups in their smoking-rooms.

"He has no weapons. He would have gone to Sevenoaks if he had been put up to it."

"Caterham will handle him...."

The shopmen told their customers. The waiters in restaurants snatched a moment for an evening paper between the courses. The cabmen read it immediately after the betting news....

The placards of the chief government evening paper were conspicuous with "Grasping the Nettle." Others relied for effect on: "Giant Redwood continues to meet the Princess." The Echo struck a line of its own with: "Rumoured Revolt of Giants in the North of England. The Sunderland Giants start for Scotland." The Westminster Gazette sounded its usual warning note. "Giants Beware," said the Westminster Gazette, and tried to make a point out of it that might perhaps serve towards uniting the Liberal party--at that time greatly torn between seven intensely egotistical leaders. The later newspapers dropped into uniformity. "The Giant in the New Kent Road," they proclaimed.

"What I want to know," said the pale young man in the tea shop, "is why we aren't getting any news of the young Cossars. You'd think they'd be

in it most of all ..."

"They tell me there's another of them young giants got loose," said the barmaid, wiping out a glass. "I've always said they was dangerous things to 'ave about. Right away from the beginning ... It ought to be put a stop to. Any'ow, I 'ope 'e won't come along 'ere."

"I'd like to 'ave a look at 'im," said the young man at the bar recklessly, and added, "I seen the Princess."

"D'you think they'll 'urt 'im?" said the barmaid.

"May 'ave to," said the young man at the bar, finishing his glass.

Amidst a hum of ten million such sayings young Caddles came to London...

II.

I think of young Caddles always as he was seen in the New Kent Road, the sunset warm upon his perplexed and staring face. The Road was thick with its varied traffic, omnibuses, trams, vans, carts, trolleys, cyclists, motors, and a marvelling crowd--loafers, women, nurse-maids, shopping women, children, venturesome hobble-dehoys--gathered behind his gingerly moving feet. The hoardings were untidy everywhere with the tattered election paper. A babblement of voices surged about him. One

sees the customers and shopmen crowding in the doorways of the shops, the faces that came and went at the windows, the little street boys running and shouting, the policemen taking it all quite stiffly and calmly, the workmen knocking off upon scaffoldings, the seething miscellany of the little folks. They shouted to him, vague encouragement, vague insults, the imbecile catchwords of the day, and he stared down at them, at such a multitude of living creatures as he had never before imagined in the world.

Now that he had fairly entered London he had had to slacken his pace more and more, the little folks crowded so mightily upon him. The crowd grew denser at every step, and at last, at a corner where two great ways converged, he came to a stop, and the multitude flowed about him and closed him in.

There he stood, with his feet a little apart, his back to a big corner gin palace that towered twice his height and ended in a sky sign, staring down at the pigmies and wondering--trying, I doubt not, to collate it all with the other things of his life, with the valley among the downlands, the nocturnal lovers, the singing in the church, the chalk he hammered daily, and with instinct and death and the sky, trying to see it all together coherent and significant. His brows were knit. He put up his huge paw to scratch his coarse hair, and groaned aloud.

"I don't see it," he said.

His accent was unfamiliar. A great babblement went across the open space--a babblement amidst which the gongs of the trams, ploughing their obstinate way through the mass, rose like red poppies amidst corn. "What did he say?" "Said he didn't see." "Said, where is the sea?" "Said, where is a seat?" "He wants a seat." "Can't the brasted fool sit on a 'ouse or somethin'?"

"What are ye for, ye swarming little people? What are ye all doing, what are ye all for?"

"What are ye doing up here, ye swarming little people, while I'm a-cuttin' chalk for ye, down in the chalk pits there?"

His queer voice, the voice that had been so bad for school discipline at Cheasing Eyebright, smote the multitude to silence while it sounded and splashed them all to tumult at the end. Some wit was audible screaming "Speech, speech!" "What's he saying?" was the burthen of the public mind, and an opinion was abroad that he was drunk. "Hi, hi, hi," bawled the omnibus-drivers, threading a dangerous way. A drunken American sailor wandered about tearfully inquiring, "What's he want anyhow?" A leathery-faced rag-dealer upon a little pony-drawn cart soared up over the tumult by virtue of his voice. "Garn 'ome, you Brasted Giant!" he brawled, "Garn 'Ome! You Brasted Great Dangerous Thing! Can't you see you're a-frightening the 'orses? Go 'ome with you! 'Asn't any one 'ad the sense to tell you the law?" And over all this uproar young Caddles stared, perplexed, expectant, saying no more.

Down a side road came a little string of solemn policemen, and threaded itself ingeniously into the traffic. "Stand back," said the little voices; "keep moving, please."

Young Caddles became aware of a little dark blue figure thumping at his shin. He looked down, and perceived two white hands gesticulating. "What?" he said, bending forward.

"Can't stand about here," shouted the inspector.

"No! You can't stand about here," he repeated.

"But where am I to go?"

"Back to your village. Place of location. Anyhow, now--you've got to move on. You're obstructing the traffic."

"What traffic?"

"Along the road."

"But where is it going? Where does it come from? What does it mean? They're all round me. What do they want? What are they doin'? I want to understand. I'm tired of cuttin' chalk and bein' all alone. What are they doin' for me while I'm a-cuttin' chalk? I may just as well

understand here and now as anywhere."

"Sorry. But we aren't here to explain things of that sort. I must arst you to move on."

"Don't you know?"

"I must arst you to move on--if you please ... I'd strongly advise you to get off 'ome. We've 'ad no special instructions yet--but it's against the law ... Clear away there. Clear away."

The pavement to his left became invitingly bare, and young Caddles went slowly on his way. But now his tongue was loosened.

"I don't understand," he muttered. "I don't understand." He would appeal brokenly to the changing crowd that ever trailed beside him and behind.

"I didn't know there were such places as this. What are all you people doing with yourselves? What's it all for? What is it all for, and where do I come in?"

He had already begotten a new catchword. Young men of wit and spirit addressed each other in this manner, "Ullo 'Arry O'Cock. Wot's it all for? Eh? Wot's it all bloomin' well for?"

To which there sprang up a competing variety of repartees, for the most part impolite. The most popular and best adapted for general use appears

to have been "Shut it," or, in a voice of scornful detachment--"Garn!"

There were others almost equally popular.

III.

What was he seeking? He wanted something the pigmy world did not give, some end which the pigmy world prevented his attaining, prevented even his seeing clearly, which he was never to see clearly. It was the whole gigantic social side of this lonely dumb monster crying out for his race, for the things akin to him, for something he might love and something he might serve, for a purpose he might comprehend and a command he could obey. And, you know, all this was dumb, raged dumbly within him, could not even, had he met a fellow giant, have found outlet and expression in speech. All the life he knew was the dull round of the village, all the speech he knew was the talk of the cottage, that failed and collapsed at the bare outline of his least gigantic need. He knew nothing of money, this monstrous simpleton, nothing of trade, nothing of the complex pretences upon which the social fabric of the little folks was built. He needed, he needed--Whatever he needed, he never found his need.

All through the day and the summer night he wandered, growing hungry but as yet untired, marking the varied traffic of the different streets, the

inexplicable businesses of all these infinitesimal beings. In the aggregate it had no other colour than confusion for him....

He is said to have plucked a lady from her carriage in Kensington, a lady in evening dress of the smartest sort, to have scrutinised her closely, train and shoulder blades, and to have replaced her--a little carelessly--with the profoundest sigh. For that I cannot vouch. For an hour or so he watched people fighting for places in the omnibuses at the end of Piccadilly. He was seen looming over Kennington Oval for some moments in the afternoon, but when he saw these dense thousands were engaged with the mystery of cricket and quite regardless of him he went his way with a groan.

He came back to Piccadilly Circus between eleven and twelve at night and found a new sort of multitude. Clearly they were very intent: full of things they, for inconceivable reasons, might do, and of others they might not do. They stared at him and jeered at him and went their way. The cabmen, vulture-eyed, followed one another continually along the edge of the swarming pavement. People emerged from the restaurants or entered them, grave, intent, dignified, or gently and agreeably excited or keen and vigilant--beyond the cheating of the sharpest waiter born. The great giant, standing at his corner, peered at them all. "What is it all for?" he murmured in a mournful vast undertone, "What is it all for? They are all so earnest. What is it I do not understand?"

And none of them seemed to see, as he could do, the drink-sodden

wretchedness of the painted women at the corner, the ragged misery that sneaked along the gutters, the infinite futility of all this employment. The infinite futility! None of them seemed to feel the shadow of that giant's need, that shadow of the future, that lay athwart their paths...

Across the road high up mysterious letters flamed and went, that might, could he have read them, have measured for him the dimensions of human interest, have told him of the fundamental needs and features of life as the little folks conceived it. First would come a flaming

T;

Then U would follow,

TU;

Then P,

TUP;

Until at last there stood complete, across the sky, this cheerful message to all who felt the burthen of life's earnestness:

TUPPER'S TONIC WINE FOR VIGOUR.

Snap! and it had vanished into night, to be followed in the same slow

development by a second universal solicitude:

BEAUTY SOAP.

Not, you remark, mere cleansing chemicals, but something, as they say, "ideal;" and then, completing the tripod of the little life:

TANKER'S YELLOW PILLS.

After that there was nothing for it but Tupper again, in naming crimson letters, snap, snap, across the void.

T U P P....

Early in the small hours it would seem that young Caddles came to the shadowy quiet of Regent's Park, stepped over the railings and lay down on a grassy slope near where the people skate in winter time, and there he slept an hour or so. And about six o'clock in the morning, he was talking to a draggled woman he had found sleeping in a ditch near Hampstead Heath, asking her very earnestly what she thought she was for....

IV.

The wandering of Caddles about London came to a head on the second day

in the morning. For then his hunger overcame him. He hesitated where the hot-smelling loaves were being tossed into a cart, and then very quietly knelt down and commenced robbery. He emptied the cart while the baker's man fled for the police, and then his great hand came into the shop and cleared counter and cases. Then with an armful, still eating, he went his way looking for another shop to go on with his meal. It happened to be one of those seasons when work is scarce and food dear, and the crowd in that quarter was sympathetic even with a giant who took the food they all desired. They applauded the second phase of his meal, and laughed at his stupid grimace at the policeman.

"I woff hungry," he said, with his mouth full.

"Brayvo!" cried the crowd. "Brayvo!"

Then when he was beginning his third baker's shop, he was stopped by half a dozen policemen hammering with truncheons at his shins. "Look here, my fine giant, you come along o' me," said the officer in charge. "You ain't allowed away from home like this. You come off home with me." They did their best to arrest him. There was a trolley, I am told, chasing up and down streets at that time, bearing rolls of chain and ship's cable to play the part of handcuffs in that great arrest. There was no intention then of killing him. "He is no party to the plot," Caterham had said. "I will not have innocent blood upon my hands." And added: "--until everything else has been tried."

At first Caddles did not understand the import of these attentions. When he did, he told the policemen not to be fools, and set off in great strides that left them all behind. The bakers' shops had been in the Harrow Road, and he went through canal London to St. John's Wood, and sat down in a private garden there to pick his teeth and be speedily assailed by another posse of constables.

"You lea' me alone," he growled, and slouched through the gardens--spoiling several lawns and kicking down a fence or so, while the energetic little policemen followed him up, some through the gardens, some along the road in front of the houses. Here there were one or two with guns, but they made no use of them. When he came out into the Edgware Road there was a new note and a new movement in the crowd, and a mounted policeman rode over his foot and got upset for his pains.

"You lea' me alone," said Caddles, facing the breathless crowd. "I ain't done anything to you." At that time he was unarmed, for he had left his chalk chopper in Regent's Park. But now, poor wretch, he seems to have felt the need of some weapon. He turned back towards the goods yard of the Great Western Railway, wrenched up the standard of a tall arc light, a formidable mace for him, and flung it over his shoulder. And finding the police still turning up to pester him, he went back along the Edgware Road, towards Cricklewood, and struck off sullenly to the north.

He wandered as far as Waltham, and then turned back westward and then again towards London, and came by the cemeteries and over the crest of

Highgate about midday into view of the greatness of the city again. He turned aside and sat down in a garden, with his back to a house that overlooked all London. He was breathless, and his face was lowering, and now the people no longer crowded upon him as they had done when first he came to London, but lurked in the adjacent garden, and peeped from cautious securities. They knew by now the thing was grimmer than they had thought. "Why can't they lea' me alone?" growled young Caddles. "I mus' eat. Why can't they lea' me alone?"

He sat with a darkling face, gnawing at his knuckles and looking down over London. All the fatigue, worry, perplexity, and impotent wrath of his wanderings was coming to a head in him. "They mean nothing," he whispered. "They mean nothing. And they won't let me alone, and they will get in my way." And again, over and over to himself, "Meanin' nothing.

"Ugh! the little people!"

He bit harder at his knuckles and his scowl deepened. "Cuttin' chalk for 'em," he whispered. "And all the world is theirs! I don't come in--nowhere."

Presently with a spasm of sick anger he saw the now familiar form of a policeman astride the garden wall.

"Lea' me alone," grunted the giant. "Lea' me alone."

"I got to do my duty," said the little policeman, with a face that was white and resolute.

"You lea' me alone. I got to live as well as you. I got to think. I got to eat. You lea' me alone."

"It's the Law," said the little policeman, coming no further. "We never made the Law."

"Nor me," said young Caddles. "You little people made all that before I was born. You and your Law! What I must and what I mustn't! No food for me to eat unless I work a slave, no rest, no shelter, nothin', and you tell me--"

"I ain't got no business with that," said the policeman. "I'm not one to argue. All I got to do is to carry out the Law." And he brought his second leg over the wall and seemed disposed to get down. Other policemen appeared behind him.

"I got no quarrel with you--mind," said young Caddles, with his grip tight upon his huge mace of iron, his face pale, and a lank explanatory great finger to the policeman. "I got no quarrel with you. But--You lea' me alone."

The policeman tried to be calm and commonplace, with a monstrous tragedy

clear before his eyes. "Give me the proclamation," he said to some unseen follower, and a little white paper was handed to him.

"Lea' me alone," said Caddles, scowling, tense, and drawn together.

"This means," said the policeman before he read, "go 'ome. Go 'ome to your chalk pit. If not, you'll be hurt."

Caddles gave an inarticulate growl.

Then when the proclamation had been read, the officer made a sign. Four men with rifles came into view and took up positions of affected ease along the wall. They wore the uniform of the rat police. At the sight of the guns, young Caddles blazed into anger. He remembered the sting of the Wreckstone farmers' shot guns. "You going to shoot off those at me?" he said, pointing, and it seemed to the officer he must be afraid.

"If you don't march back to your pit--"

Then in an instant the officer had slung himself back over the wall, and sixty feet above him the great electric standard whirled down to his death. Bang, bang, bang, went the heavy guns, and smash! the shattered wall, the soil and subsoil of the garden flew. Something flew with it, that left red drops on one of the shooter's hands. The riflemen dodged this way and that and turned valiantly to fire again. But young Caddles, already shot twice through the body, had spun about to find who it was

had hit him so heavily in the back. Bang! Bang! He had a vision of houses and greenhouses and gardens, of people dodging at windows, the whole swaying fearfully and mysteriously. He seems to have made three stumbling strides, to have raised and dropped his huge mace, and to have clutched his chest. He was stung and wrenched by pain.

What was this, warm and wet, on his hand?

One man peering from a bedroom window saw his face, saw him staring, with a grimace of weeping dismay, at the blood upon his hand, and then his knees bent under him, and he came crashing to the earth, the first of the giant nettles to fall to Caterham's resolute clutch, the very last that he had reckoned would come into his hand.